

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1           1.     A vending machine, comprising:  
2                     a housing for storing products to be dispensed;  
3                     a product dispensing assembly comprising a dispenser for holding and dispensing  
4 products,  
5                     wherein the dispenser has an open side and is mounted substantially horizontally  
6 within the housing and rotatable about an axis,  
7                     wherein the dispenser uses a retractable gauge step adaptable to vend products of  
8 various sizes;  
9                     a product chute for receiving products when dispensed by the dispenser; and  
10                    a motor coupled to the dispenser for rotating the dispenser.
  
- 1           2.     The vending machine according to claim 1, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 substantially permanently affixed to the product dispensing assembly.
  
- 1           3.     The vending machine according to claim 2, wherein the retractable gauge step  
2 adaptable to being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to  
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.
  
- 1           4.     The vending machine according to claim 3, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 adaptable to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step  
3 does not support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           5.       The vending machine according to claim 4, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 operable to slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to  
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position where the gauge  
4 step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product  
5 dispensing assembly.

1           6.       The vending machine according to claim 5, wherein the retractable gauge step  
2 comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

1           7.       The vending machine according to claim 6, wherein the retractable gauge step  
2 comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

1           8.       The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the product dispensing assembly  
2 has a plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the  
3 cutout slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are  
4 substantially permanently affixed to each other.

1           9.       The vending machine according to claim 8, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a  
3 plurality of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           10.      The vending machine according to claim 9, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the  
3 gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           11.     The vending machine according to claim 10, wherein the retractable gauge step is  
2 operable to slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality  
3 of gauge steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of  
4 positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products  
5 resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           12.     A method for dispensing products from a vending machine, comprising the steps of:  
2                   storing products in a product dispensing assembly;  
3                   employing a retractable gauge step for supporting products stored in the product  
4 dispensing assembly; wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable to dispense products of various  
5 sizes; and  
6                   dispensing products from the dispensing assembly in a sequential manner.

1           13.     The method according to claim 12, wherein the retractable gauge step is substantially  
2 permanently affixed to the product dispensing assembly.

1           14.     The method according to claim 13, wherein the retractable gauge step adaptable to  
2 being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the  
3 product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           15.     The method according to claim 14, wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable  
2 to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not  
3 support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           16.     The method according to claim 15, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to  
2     slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the  
3     product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position where the gauge step is  
4     retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing  
5     assembly.

1           17.     The method according to claim 16, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a  
2     plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

1           18.     The method according to claim 17, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a  
2     plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

1           19.     The method according to claim 18, wherein the product dispensing assembly has a  
2     plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the cutout  
3     slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are  
4     substantially permanently affixed to each other.

1           20.     The method according to claim 19, wherein the retractable gauge step is further  
2     adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality  
3     of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           21.     The method according to claim 20, wherein the retractable gauge step is further  
2     adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge  
3     step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

1           22.    The method according to claim 21, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to  
2   slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge  
3   steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of positions  
4   where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in  
5   the product dispensing assembly.